

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Spirituality is on the rise, and writing on spirituality is becoming increasingly popular. Bookstores everywhere are now more sensitive to this particular need. We are aware that an additional section, namely inspirational writing, has been added to the book aisles. This section caters mainly to followers of both traditional religions and New Age spirituality.

This heightened sense of spirituality is also evident in Malaysia, and books on spirituality are fast gaining popularity even in Malaysia. Authors like Deepak Chopra, Shirley MacLaine, Lilian Too, etc, are capturing the attention of the masses with books like *Conversation with God*, *Out On A Limb*, etc. The *Chicken Soup of the Soul*

series is a good indicator of the sudden burst of interest in things spiritual. Even the present crowned king of children fiction, the *Harry Potter* series is a reflection, in part, of the interest in spirituality, capturing the imagination of both children and adults alike.

With the influx of such literature, the market is fused with numerous interpretations on spirituality based on its varied differing opinions on what it is and how it is attainable. Without doubt, an undiscerning reader will find it difficult to wade through the swamp of spiritual information. For example, each religion offers a different concept of God, and in some books, there is even an amalgamation of different concepts.

In the light of such varied approaches, text analysis into these inspirational writings would help to identify some linguistic patterns and show the relationship between the patterns identified and spiritual concepts. This would give insights into how the meanings of certain inspirational concepts are realised grammatically in particular manner.

## 1.1 Aims of Study

The importance of inspirational writings is growing and becoming extremely widespread. Its field encompasses a wide range of topics ranging from Islamic teachings to Taoism, Judaism to Christianity, etc. I am well aware how large a scope inspirational writing falls under. In this area of inspirational writings, I will concentrate on one of its types, that is, inspirational writings with Christian themes.

Inspirational writings are writings that inspire the reader towards transcendence and a belief in a higher being(s). Inspirational writings with Christian

themes are writings that inspire the reader towards faith from Christian perspectives. The Christian perspectives originate from the concepts and tenets of Christianity. I have read widely in this area. Thus, equipped with an in-depth knowledge, I choose to study inspirational writings with Christian themes. I choose it with no intent of advocating or propagating the themes in this paper, but my main intention is to identify the linguistic patterns evident in such works. This study is purely a linguistic enterprise into the inspirational writings with Christian themes. Therefore, the aim of study is to provide a brief overview of how Nominal Groups function in inspirational writings with Christian themes.

Nominal Groups are what traditional classification calls noun phrases, but they function differently in the Hallidayan model of grammar. In order to analyse the Nominal Groups, I am using the systemic-functional approach initiated by M. A. K. Halliday. I wish to search for patterns that may arise by comparing the functions of the Nominal Groups with concepts in the inspirational writings with Christian themes.

The systemic-functional approach to the study of Nominal Groups draws primarily from the principles of lexico-grammatical analysis found in *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Halliday, 1994), in particular, the analysis of the Nominal Groups in chapter six of the book. The present study attempts to find out how functional relations relate to the concepts in inspirational writings with Christian themes; and how that relationship between concept and function affects the choice of words.

For example, if the concept of God is one of monotheism, then the word *God* cannot be subclassed as *good God* or *bad God*, like how the word *train* can be

subclassed as *night train* or *morning train*. Because that would mean that there are two kinds of God, one good and another evil.

## 1.2 Research Questions

This study sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequent Nominal Group structures in inspirational writings with Christian themes?
2. What are the multiple functions of Nominal Groups in inspirational writings with Christian themes?
3. How does the choice of words in Nominal Groups highlight the different attributes inherent in the concept of God in inspirational writings with Christian themes?

## 1.3 The Research Area

Nominal Groups are chosen for this study because Nominal Groups comprise the semantic core of every text and allow for the widest range of meanings to be expressed. They form an integral part of the language as a resource for meaning.

For example, in a sentence taken from a text on inspirational writings, *Beyond the sores of Lazarus, He saw a soul of eternal worth*. Those underlined are the Nominal Groups. If some parts of the Nominal Groups were deleted, the semantic load would be lowered considerably: *Beyond the sores, He saw a soul*. By deleting of

*Lazarus, the sores* could belong to any person, or even an animal – identification of the person or animal would have to be deduced from other parts of the text, which is not included here. Similarly, by deleting *of eternal worth*, the value of *the soul* has been considerably reduced and the richness of the description is lost.

By applying Halliday's systemic-functional approach, the Nominal Group can be extracted as a unit of the clause, and further broken down into its smaller units for analysis. This type of analysis helps to identify the functional roles these grammatical units possess in the Nominal Groups, and the kind of meanings associated with them.

Because of its function as an integral expression of meaning, it is hoped that an analysis of Nominal Groups would give a very clear picture of the concepts evident in inspirational writings with Christian themes. Inspirational writings are full of profound meanings written in an abstract manner. Thus, a systemic-functional analysis of its Nominal Groups will be able to delineate the meaning in smaller and more manageable units.

## 1.4 Rationale of Study

I am drawn towards analysing Nominal Groups in inspirational writings with Christian themes for three reasons:

Firstly, I am familiar with the concepts in the inspirational writings with Christian themes, having read and studied them since 1991. I have even taught some of these concepts to students in the bible study programmes run by my church. I do not

claim to know everything but I am sure of the basic concepts and that would help me to unravel the different concepts embedded in the texts, using linguistic tools.

Secondly, after searching the databases of abstracts of recent linguistic works and journals from 1981 to 2000, I did not come across work done on inspirational writings with Christian themes using the systemic-functional approach. This does not mean that no research has been done on this subject, but merely no published works are recorded in the databases I went through. Thus, I wish to explore this area using the systemic-functional approach.

Thirdly, I personally believe that inspirational writings will become a major diet in people's reading habits. The renewed interest in spirituality is spearheading a renewed interest in inspirational writings. This would not only escalate reading but also writing in this area. Thus, this is an appropriate time to study these texts.

## 1.5 Significance of Study

I believe the renewed interest in inspirational writings is creating vast opportunities for the growth of this kind of writing. More so, it is establishing itself as a genre of writing to be reckoned with, and emerging as a school of thought for discussion and analysis.

More and more writers are entering this field of writing: both the well-established and fledging ones who aspire to write in this genre. There is a need to know how these writings are presented linguistically and how pedagogical insights can be derived to impart knowledge to people who want to learn more about this genre.

This study would help to see the importance of Nominal Groups and its structure in inspirational writings. It would contribute pedagogical ideas to this field of ESP, in this case, English for Inspirational Writings.

As the scope of inspirational writings gets wider and its concepts more varied and inter-related, there exists a need to have a better delineation of the different kinds of concepts that exists within that genre. The systemic-functional approach is one of the better tools to analyse texts that are complex with concepts. It would help link meaning with function, and truth with experience.

I believe this kind of study on inspirational writings using the systemic-functional approach will not be the last of its kind, because of the mounting popularity of inspirational writings.

## 1.6 Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations. Firstly, only inspirational writings with Christian themes are chosen because my knowledge with the concepts.

Secondly, this paper selects only five texts of inspirational writings with Christian themes, out of a vast resource of material published yearly on Christian themes. And out of the five texts, I am concentrating only on the first 100 sentences of each first chapter.

Thirdly, this study concentrates solely on the structures and functions of Nominal Groups. There are other groups within the same rank that are not selected, for example, the verbal group, the adverbial group and the conjunction group.

Fourthly, I am dealing with the internal structure of the Nominal Group, its elements and the functions of its elements. In other words, I am looking into how the information is organised within the inter-related elements of a Nominal Group. I am not concentrating on how the Nominal Groups function in relation to other elements of the clause, and to the larger text, for example, searching for Nominal Group cohesion in the text.

Lastly, the analysis is done manually and not through computer parsing. This manual process is slow and tedious, and can be subjected to error and oversight, though I have taken extreme care in providing a true and accurate picture of Nominal Groups in inspirational writings with Christian themes.

Further research can be done on inspirational writing with other religious themes, and using computer-parsing methods could cover a wider scope of texts. Comparisons between different types of inspirational writings could give a better perspective on the genre. Apart from Nominal Groups, other groups can be analysed. And rather than just concentrating on the internal structure of the group, its external functions as an element in the Transitivity system can be analysed.

## 1.7 Organisation of Thesis

The thesis is written in five chapters. Chapter One is an introduction to the paper. Chapter Two reviews literature related to Nominal Groups. Chapter Three provides the research methodology and a theoretical framework of the study. Chapter Four provides the analysis and interpretation of data. Chapter Five discusses the findings and draws a conclusion with recommendations and suggestions for further study.



Apart from the five chapters, there are 11 appendices. Appendix 1 is a glossary of terms. Appendices 2-6 are the Tables of Analysis for Extract One to Extract Five. Appendices 7-11 are the Extracts of the five chosen texts.

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter is an introductory chapter to the paper *An Analysis Of Nominal Groups In Inspirational Writings: A Systemic-Functional Approach*. It covers the aims of the study; the research area; the reasons for pursuing the said topic; the significance of the study; and the limitations of the study. It also gives a brief outline of how the thesis is organised.